

"I don't stop to take no text, fellers, and don't know how to say a long and pious prayer like the tenderfoot parsons, nor do I pretend to string out a lot of firstlies, and secondlies, and so on—

"Well, pard," demanded one of the auditors, "what sort of an outfit have you got for us then?"

"Boys, I've just got a story, that's all. Now it stands this way: A young feller as well off and comfortable to home with his pa and ma, and he didn't know how well off he was. He was a triffin', mean sort of a sneak, too, who sassed his pa and ma and hung around public places all day, and wouldn't work a lick, not he. Let his pa do it all."

Severe opinions of this shabby conduct were expressed by various persons in the crowd. When quiet was restored the speaker went on:

"By'm by he run off."

"Good thing for his folks," said a burly miner.

"You might have thought so," replied Prodigal Jim, "but his ma just kept on cryin' as if her heart would break. Now that low life chap he let word go back to the old folks that he was killed."

"See here, stranger," shouted a ranchman near the door, "are them straight goods?"

"If the truth was told," replied Prodigal Jim, "it's more'n likely a good fit for you, and that's what I'm a drivin' at, a fittin' of the truth onto the prodigals out here, far away from the old home."

"Go on with that story, pard," said a grisly hunter near by.

"Well, when his ma heard he was killed she didn't take no comfort 'cause he was wild and no good, not she. Boys, she just tarted to die from that minute. The burden was too heavy for her to bear. Her lovin' heart kept bleedin' drop by drop for her lost boy, 'cause it was all the boy she had, and you know how mothers is, anyhow, boys. They never gives you up, not they. You may stab them to the heart and yet they just keep on lovin' you, and pinin' away, and prayin' the good Lord for you, and so it goes on as long as there's life in 'em. Ain't that so, boys?"

There were moist eyes in the assembly, and the ranchman near the door buried his face in his hands.

"Now boys, what do you think the mother of this boy did? Why she just fixed his room for him, a hopin' against hope that some day he might come back, and she kept it that way plumb up to the day that they put her under the ground."

At this point the ranchman arose and with a trembling voice demanded: "Say, stranger, who be you?"

"Jim Parkman is my name, Prodigal Jim they call me. I was shore enough prodigal like the rest, but when I got plenty of the yellow stuff, sez I, now I'm goin' home to fix up Pa and Ma comfortable. But the Lord had made 'em comfortable long before I got there, and there was nothin' I could do for

'em, boys, not one thing. Now stranger, whose prodigal are you?"

"I'm Jake Harkless," replied the ranchman, "and you have hit me right twixt the eyes, reg'lar center shot, and I'm a goin' home, goin' to start right now, stranger, and please God to let me find the old folks alive when I get there."

"Now boys, that's the way it was with the other feller," continued prodigal Jim after the ranchman had left. "Now you see I don't know nothin' 'bout this feller's case, but 'tother one when he got home he never saw his Ma. She was dead and gone. But his Pa fixed him up with a bran new outfit, and had a regular jubilation 'cause his wild boy had got back safe and sound and sensible."

"Now boys that's just what's a waitin' up yonder for you and me when we starts for home all right and sensible, and sorry for our wild pranks, and don't you forget it, boys. And don't wait 'til you get all the yellow stuff you want, neither, for you might wait the few days too long, and then you'd give all the yellow stuff you've got and more too to have it all to do over again, but it won't do no good."

CHAPTER V

Again we come back to the little farm house in the east. The neighbors have all gathered to the funeral of Melinda Harkless. They are solemn and hushed, and stand or sit with bowed heads, most of them apparently in deep meditation over this coming of the chariots of God into their midst. Presently the funeral tones of the country pastor sound forth their solemn message to the listening assembly.

After the service the procession wends to the little graveyard on the hill, where, beside the open grave, according to the custom of the country the last look is taken at the dead. The neighbors filed past the coffin, lingering a moment to wonder at that calm, fixed smile, as if Melinda Harkless had found all heart soreness healed and all her heart weariness rested by the very first glimpse of God's hand in the troublesome tangle and preplexity of this life.

Then last of all came farmer Harkless, aged and broken, his snow white hair falling around his temples, his eyes yielding to sorrow the last tribute of tears as he leaned heavily on his cane and took the last long look at that face which had in the days gone by smiled upon his strong young manhood.

Soon the grave was filled, and the neighbors, taking turns at the shovel, rounded and shaped the symmetrical mound and patted it smooth, gently patting it as if they were trying to make the strokes of the shovel express the tender consideration which they felt for the dead, as well as for the sorrowing, solitary mourner.

So they stood up at last when the task was finished, and looked silently down at the new grave, waiting for the preacher to dismiss the assembly.

In a little while they had all gone, all but the poor old man, who sat down by the grave

when he was left alone, and gazed back into the past, and then into the dark future, wondering what was going to become of him now. Suddenly he is roused from his sad reverie by sounds of rapid galloping. Turning toward the road he noticed a stranger who flung himself from the foaming horse and came toward the graveyard. With a cry he sank upon the new made grave and moaned out the anguish for which there are no words.

"Who be you?" said farmer Harkless with a trembling yet aggressive accent, as if he would defend the grave of his loved one from sacrilege.

"Father," said the stranger, stretching his hands toward the old man, "It's me. It's your prodigal boy come back. But O! I'm too late. I can't say nothin' to her."

"Well, Jakey, boy, the room's ready for you, just like it's been all the time, and that's the truth."

And as the two went toward the little farm house, now so desolate, the tottering old man leaned heavily upon the arm of his boy who "was dead, but is alive again."

Our Young People

The Vision of the Heart

There is a vision by the heart

Of things divine by sense unseen;
We know, but only know in part,
For clouds and shadows intervene.

From lines and segments we conclude
The parts unseen, in dim surmise,
And fashion thence in outline rude
The grandeur hidden from our eyes.

Upon the section of a stream,
Arched by a bridge and joining wall,
I see the distant tree tops gleam,
And other objects, great and small.

From these revealed, may I not know
The parts not in the mirror given;
The rocks and roots which lie below,
And birds and clouds which swim in heaven?

Some solid base yon roof requires,
That segment, a completed arch;
A sun unseen burns in those fires
Which fringe the cloud land's golden march.

A broken shell upon the beach,
A web foot printed in the sand,
May tell of life beyond our reach,
Tho little more we understand.

A feather means a bird and air;
A fin, a fish and rolling wave;
Thus to conclude we know is fair,
Tho these were all that nature gave.

Thus, from the present's partial sheen
Of broken hopes and mingled bliss,
Our faith infers a life unseen,
And worlds the complement of this.

And so from love that will not die,
Nor loose the clasp which nature gave,
We know there is a home on high,
And life and love beyond the grave.

—Joel Swartz.

VISION AND SERVICE

Ex. 24: 15-18; Matt. 17: 1-8, 14-20

Topic for May 13

The lesson of this week gives us a brief but vivid picture of the transfiguration of Jesus before the three disciples, Peter, James and John, Moses and Elijah appearing with him in the vision, and then immediately after as they go down the mountain